

The Builder.

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OUR opinions on the subject of competitions are tolerably well known, as is our anxiety to obtain such an administration of them as would prevent the serious mischief to which they now give rise. Advice, exposure, and indignant remonstrance against unjust proceedings, have all failed to produce any useful results, nor can any change be hoped for so long as architects are to be found capable of availing themselves of the errors of the system, and who are therefore interested in maintaining them. So long as architects will supply goods for nothing, and trust for a recognition of their merits to the decision of committees necessarily incapable of judging them correctly—open to the influence of friends and connections—glad, indeed, of any thing to guide them in their dark search after what they don't know when they see it—and, being irresponsible, not afraid to yield to this influence even when they do happen to know better,—so long must architectural competitions remain, even under not worse than ordinary circumstances, a mere game of chance, at which, as there are usually some cheats at the table, the fair player has little chance of success. The prohibition of names, and adoption of mottoes, the impartiality which is to result from the committee's supposed ignorance of any of the candidates, is mere sham and pretence,—a deceit and a snare,—and should be got rid of at once, if irresponsible parties, avowedly not fitted by their calling or pursuits to judge correctly the comparative merits of the designs submitted, are to make the selection. So, too, the old-fashioned notion that it is dishonourable for the competitors, in a case where the worth of the plan is alone supposed to have weight, to canvass their judges, and misrepresent their opponents, may as well be given up, as it is sadly in the way of those few competing architects who are so foolish as still to entertain it. Let each stand on the same ground as his neighbor in this respect at all events, and let the part that ear-wiggery and personal influence are to play be clearly understood.

The degrading effect of open competitions as now conducted, on architects, can scarcely be questioned; and none will deny that alteration is loudly called for, when it is so clearly seen that the character and well-being of the whole profession are at stake.

We have been led to make these remarks by a consideration of the number of competitions at this moment under our notice, and the bickerings and abuse to which some of these have given rise,—subjecting us to such an amount of really painful correspondence as many would scarcely believe in. With regard to special cases, however, we shall refer to this correspondence as little as may be.

The most important of the current competitions, that for the Middlesex Pauper Lunatic Asylum, was decided on Thursday. The committee first selected twelve designs from the whole number sent in, and a sub-committee then pointed out the three which they considered best entitled to the premiums offered, which selection, if we understand

rightly, was confirmed by the general board. The following is a list of the successful competitors:—

- 1st premium—Mr. Danks.
2nd premium—Mr. George Godwin and Mr. Harris.
3rd premium—Messrs. Allom and Crosse.

We have at present no further particulars of this competition before us, and would therefore of course except it from any reference to our previous remarks.

The committee for erecting a Workhouse for the Ayleham Union, who offered through our columns one hundred guineas to the person whose plan should be approved by the Guardians and the Poor-Law Commissioners, unless he should be afterwards employed in the erection of the workhouse, in which case he would be paid the usual commission, have made their selection from a considerable number of plans which were forwarded to them. According to one of our informants, Mr. Hopkins is the successful candidate, while another (who ought to be equally well informed) says it is Mr. Donthorne. Whichever it may be, the statements show an amount of mystification that may account, in a degree, for some severe comments on the proceedings sent to us by a local observer, who states that the canvassing was scarcely disguised, and that those competitors who, without local influence, sent plans simply in reply to the advertisements, might more usefully have hung them up in their own waiting-room.

The competition for the London Fever Hospital was of a different character, being confined to three architects—Mr. C. Fowler, Mr. Mocatta, and Mr. Railton—with the understanding that fifty guineas would be paid to the two unsuccessful candidates,—a mode of proceeding highly honourable to the committee, and most likely to ensure a good plan. Saved from positive loss by such arrangement, each competitor would be led to give himself wholly to the task, and do his best. The estimate for the building was not to exceed 12,000*l.*; full instructions accompanied the letter, setting forth the requirements both for the hospital and living departments. The hospital was to accommodate 200 patients, half of each sex, with lifts from floor to floor, baths, closets, nurses' rooms, kitchen, sculleries, &c. The wards were to be divided into acute-disease, convalescent, and noisy wards; with a large ward for cases not of fever, but entered as such. The domestic arrangements consisted of the comptroller's, medical officers', and matrons' rooms; surgery, medicine and food lifts, the culinary and servants' departments; bedrooms for the whole establishment; besides the laundry, the usual out-buildings, stores, furnace, engine-rooms, dead-house, &c. &c.

The extent of building necessary to fulfil all these demands, made the question of expense of the greatest consideration. The committee must be aware how cramped the architect is; and it is to be hoped, now the matter is settled, that they may ultimately relax in this respect, and afford increased facilities.

A building committee having examined them, the designs were referred to the medical officers for a report, and on the 19th the general committee decided in favour of Mr. Mocatta. The selected design consists of two wing buildings, two stories high, of double wards, for either sex, connected by corridors with a central building, which is appropriated to the medical officers, board-room, and physician, in front, and extends backwards for the matron, &c., with outbuildings still further removed. The style is Italian.

In the rooms where hang the designs sent in for the London Union Workhouse, the decision on which was mentioned by us last week, a battle of a singular character has been carried on. The author of the 2nd premium design, Mr. Danks, strengthened by the fact that the selected design (by Mr. Tress) was placed before his own by a majority of one only, that the decision was deemed irregular by some of the guardians, and that in the chosen plan there is a grave departure from the instructions, has, by the publication of printed papers and verbal declaration setting forth that there is great want of accommodation and means of classification in the selected design, with every thing that can be required in his own, sought to obtain a reversion of the decision.

Making all allowances for the extent to which the author of the second plan may consider himself aggrieved, we cannot hesitate to express a decided disapproval of the course he has adopted. Such proceedings as those we witnessed in the room, on the occasion of a meeting of the various parties interested, pained us more than we can express. The dignity of the profession is compromised by such strugglings,—the artist is lost in the tradesman.

The plot of land on which the workhouse is to be built is a parallelogram, 275 feet wide, in the road from Stratford to London, and about 720 feet deep. The selected plan has the entrance-front next the Stratford-road, that is, the narrow way of the land, and is of the H shape. In the centre, between the lower arms, or those next the road, is placed the chapel; and in a corresponding position between the upper arms, the kitchen; and, extending still further backwards, the dining-hall and infirmary. The plan is compact, and the architectural character good. The style is Italian, with a campanile: the material, brick, with stone dressings.

The main points to be considered, however, and which are properly dwelt on in the instructions to architects, are accommodation and perfect classification; and in these we are compelled to consider the design inefficient. To find where a thousand paupers are to be bestowed with any thing like propriety, requires more ingenuity than we possess. Mr. Tress, however, asserts that they can be provided for. The Poor-Law Commissioners must settle the question between us.

We mentioned that the design shewed a grave departure from the instructions. This referred to the fact that the plan is made to occupy 292 feet in width instead of 275 feet, the extent given to the other competitors. This reflects considerably on the guardians, and would seem to justify those members of their body who assert openly that the selection of this design was determined on from the first announcement of the competition.*

Nor is it any answer to the objection to say, that nearly the same arrangement is compatible with the less extent,—the award was made on a design evidently prepared on different in-

* One newspaper writer, not a guardian, writes as follows:—

"There is the strongest reason for suspecting from the mere fact of things, and apart from rumour, that under any circumstances No. 2 was the preferred design, or rather its author, the present architect. Here is a building estimated at 12,000*l.* after invitation by public advertisement for two other architects to compete for a workhouse to hold one thousand paupers, have selected a design, providing accommodation for about 1,200 persons, a large number of whom are buddled together in 275 feet wide and 720 feet deep, in dimensions surpassing parts of the ground itself, which only required for day rooms, albeit the competitors have the satisfaction of knowing that the body down display the 'present' model, and the 'new' builded picture is sold frames and plan, that are to be seen in the room and the competitors who have provided for 'one thousand paupers,' are here told that 'in point of their accommodations for that number is not required, or words to that effect. A most unfeeling indifference to plan has been manifested, as many of the guardians have been to be aware, and a motion to call in the professional aid to the administration was resisted by the chairman of the committee, Mr. Alderman, who was in England on the only convenient mode for a competition design, and an honest estimate, 'do do do.'"